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COLOR ORNAMENTATION.

COLORING is the decorative part of art. It answers to rhythm and rhyme in poetry as the means of attracting the senses. As it is a means of producing, so its indispensable qualification is, beauty. In the higher aims of art it should be made subservient to character and expression, by according with the nature of the subject; in the lesser arts its function is to produce a harmonizing effect and to some extent a pictorial one, for under all circumstances, and to whatsoever purpose applied, the first qualification of coloring as a means of art, is that it should produce a picture.

In the higher arts the mere representation of any object, however accurately detailed and colored, does not constitute a picture; it must be represented with suitable accessories. In decoration, however, this picture is replaced by harmony,

Individuals may have preferences, and as is usual with preferences desire to use them in many instances, perhaps, when they are not suitable. This may be overlooked in the amateur, for the professional decorator will make efforts to correct the fault if it interferes with the harmonious result of his work; but that an artist should entertain such a prejudice or permit a preference to control his judgment would interfere very seriously with his success. In our remarks last month upon ornamentation we pointed out the unsatisfactory results of a misjudged application of decoration, and found, in an existing instance, an example of a failure to appreciate the adaptability of place and color.

Desirable as is green in nature and agreeable to the eyes, despite the harmonious blending of foliage and sky, it is a color that must be used with great care in the interior of our houses and the bright green of the fields would be incongruous, in the majority of instances, if transported to our inner walls. While the bright green is avoided, do not commit the error of adopting what Mr. William Morris calls "a dingy, bilious-looking yellow-green," a color, Mr. Morris wishes it to be distinctly understood, he is not responsible for.

Blue may be considered as a more popular shade than green and may be more readily employed in masses; but this, too, has many phases that require judicious handling, from the pale, washed out, "greenery" blue, beautiful when just right but atrocious when wrong, to the deep reddish-blue or purple.

These suggestions as to the difficulties that rest in colors, and difficulties as they are that grow with each color in almost mathematical proportions, are made merely to remind the decorator that the use of colors in the average room must be moderate and subdued, and some degree of relief, found only in a certain soberness, is always required from the light and lively tones of a rich and deep shade.

We apply color to decorations for two fold reasons, it gives to the objects so treated a new charm—a charm impossible to obtain without this agency, and it likewise separates parts of figures or objects and thus gives shape and form to them.

Its first province, that of lending a charm to the objects, is only possible in the hands of a per-

son of knowledge and good taste; with such its effect is beautiful in the extreme. Knowledge is the true secret to effective decoration, as it is to all else, and mere surface knowledge will not answer, but the thorough acquaintance with the principles and reasons of color harmonies is required, such as may be acquired in the studio of some artist or in one of the many excellent schools we have for that purpose.

The second purpose of color, in separating forms and defining shapes, while being of almost equal importance in the general appearance does not, of course, call for the skill in application, and the knowledge sufficient for this may be readily acquired by less arduous study. This quality which color has of separating forms is often lost sight of, and much confusion thereby results. If it is worth while to produce a decorative form, it is worth while to render it visible; and yet how much ornament, and even good ornament, is lost to the eye through the confusion of its colors.

Color alone, we think, has greater charms than form alone, yet colors, as has been said, when placed together can only please and satisfy the educated when they are combined harmoniously or according to the laws of harmony.

There must then be laws which govern the arrangement of colors, and these laws it is necessary for the decorator to understand before he can gracefully raise it into an art.

Artists like La Farge and Tiffany in this country and Sir Frederick Leighton in England have mastered the true theories of decoration and the most advantageous employment of colors. The latter's recent fresco representing the interior of an ancient armorers shop, is said to be a marvel of the use of colors and their effective massing, and his beautiful frieze, referred to in our London correspondence, shows the inexhaustible resource of the artist.

Some of the decorative painting in the more recent buildings in this country, are guarantees for the improvements that the cultivation of the "color talent" has made in our art.

WE have received from John A. Lowell & Co., of Boston, a proof of an engraving whose subject has been borrowed from Hunt's picture of "The Bathers." The purpose of the engraving is so entirely original, and the end sought in its peculiar effect is so decidedly novel for work of this character, that it deserves the most careful attention. The idea, as we take it, is to approach in some manner the effect of an oil painting, more particularly a painting of the modern French school, where a view at short range shows outlines and details that might almost be called crude if we were not familiar with their author, but when seen from the distance of a yard or more, the exquisite shading is developed and every minutæ of fibre or muscle is cleanly and distinctly traced. In examining the work it is easy to understand that the engraver, S. A. Schoff, exhausted three years in his efforts to perfect it, and the final accomplishment is certainly a success of no inconsiderable importance, for it opens a new field for the art, though the field may be said to embrace new results rather than new means.

We presume the subject chosen was selected on account of its uniqueness, yet we feel that a somewhat better choice might have been made; there were certain features in the original painting that could have been improved and the engraver has been compelled necessarily to reproduce these features. Still whatever may be the opinion as to subject, the engraving is remarkable in many ways and shows a treatment and handling that is most artistic and effective.